

PHOENIX



Journal on
Music & Dance

APRIL 1998

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- Two Living
Legends

- Diamond
Jubilee of
Ramanavami
Fete

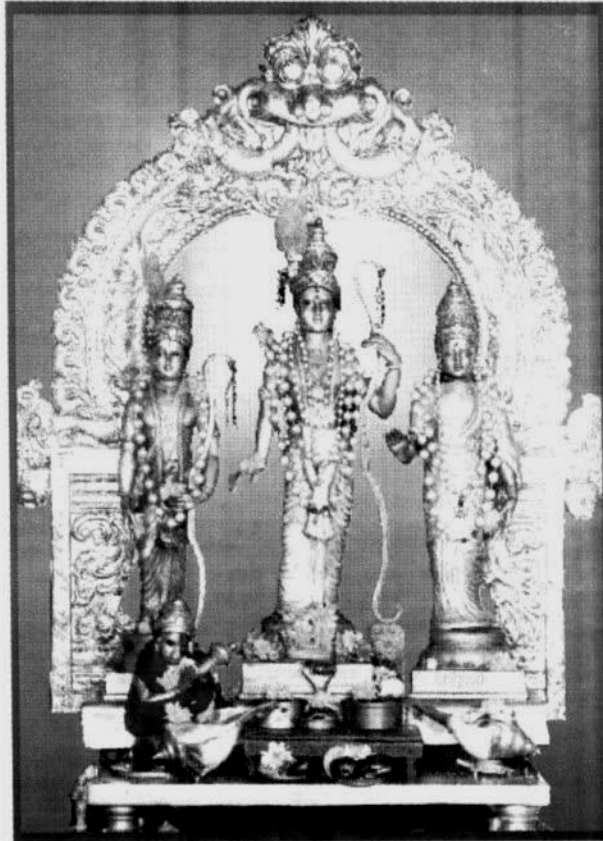


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FROM THE EDITOR

Almost one year to the day, when suddenly and most unexpectedly N. Sundarraj, the inspiration and spirit behind PHOENIX passed away, more than the forlorn feeling what stared before my eyes was the bleak future for the journal which the two of us had so fondly launched. Left alone, I kept wondering how I could face the innumerable friends who had unsolicitedly enrolled as its subscribers. Even more haunting were his own words that reverberated in my ears. He had opined, half in jest and half in earnest, that if either of us is out of the scene the journal would have no alternative than to gracefully fold up.

I was actually getting helplessly reconciled to such an eventuality. It was verily the end of the road for the journal and I saw no opening to wriggle out of the situation. Whenever I faced a subscriber or a reader I felt guilty, fighting for words to explain my predicament. But to my utter disbelief, none of them asked any questions about the fate of their subscription some of them running to three years. On the contrary, almost without exception each, whether in the City or elsewhere, urged me not to abandon the publication. Please continue it, they exhorted.

What is more heartening, reassuring is the spontaneous way each assured me 'any help' in that direction. One or two artistes among them straightaway offered to meet the expenses till such time that it was on a firm footing. That, however, could not be accepted. Firstly it would be unethical, and secondly, if at all, I was looking for a long-time arrangement.

But the good will that PHOENIX had earned in such a short time was so overwhelming, so revealing and so encouraging that the indefatigable optimist in me prompted me to believe that it was all not over. Soon I started exploring the possibilities of reviving it. What provided the impetus to my efforts is the assurance of Ramaprasad (of Sri Ramaseva Mandali, Chamarajpet). His negotiations with THE BANGALORE PRESS yielded instant results and thanks to the enthusiasm of the Press's Managing Director Ananth and friend K. C. Shivappa, his colleague, things started moving fast and true to its name, PHOENIX has risen from the ashes!

As you see, its shape, form and contents subscribe to the standard it had set for itself and would surely do proud to Sundarraj, its founder. All it needs is a sustenance. By no means should it become a liability to its foster father, THE BANGALORE PRESS. I am sure the tremendous goodwill it has earned will be soon transformed into concrete help so that the journal would work with renewed vigour to become worthy of the trust and confidence reposed in it by its readers and well-wishers.

M.S. SHEELA : OFF TO CONQUER NEW FRONTIERS



OFF TO US : M.S. Sheela with Nalina Mohan (Violin) and A.V. Anand (Mridangam)

It is well known that M. S. Sheela, one of the leading Carnatic vocalists of the present generation, is as popular locally as she is with audiences abroad. Her concert tours of America and Canada have almost become a routine.

This year, Bhairavi Fine Arts Society of Cleveland, Ohio, USA has invited her to sing in its ensuing Thyagaraja Aradhana. Bhairavi is a wellknown cultural organisation of North America, engaged in the propagation of Indian culture. The 21-year old

organisation every year invites eminent artists from India for this prestigious annual.

Sheela will be leaving on her 30-concert tour, spread over 10 weeks, on April 1 this year. The other important centres where Sheela is slated to perform are: Phoenix, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, Cincinnati, New Jersey, Pittsburg, Montrael, Ottawa, Toronto. In Pittsburg she will sing for the Purandhara Das day, resonating exclusively the Saint-Singer's compositions.

But generally, she has been requested to render 'heavy classical stuff', including the raga, thana, pallavi feature.

During her tour, which comes just two years after the one in 1996 at the invitation of the Carnatic Association of North America (CMANA), Sheela will have for accompaniments Nalina Mohan on the violin and A. V. Anand on the mridangam. Both are accomplished artistes in their dispensations and no strangers either in the new world. □

COLLOQUIUM ON VEENA

Leadng musicians and scientists, including Dr. Raja Ramanna, the internationally-known physicist, thronged to take part in a colloquium and festival on Veena, the ancient and best-known solo instrument in the Carnatic genre. The three-day fare was held on March 26, 27 and 28 in the city.

Organised by the Tarangini Fine Arts Foundation, it was held in the campus of the National

Institute of Advanced Studies, off the Indian Institute of Science.

Dr. Suma Sudhindra, the well-known vainika and the Director of Tarangini was its organiser. The academic sessions covered subjects like "Interaction with Veena-makers", "Future of Veena in the Electronic Era", "Veena and its scientific aspects" and "the role of organisers in promoting Veena as a major concert instrument".

Secretaries and other office

-bearers of reputed organisations like Soorya and Swathi Tirunal Sabha, Tiruvananthapuram, Music Academy, Chennai, Shanmukhananda Sabha, Mumbai, South Indian Music Organisation, Secunderabad and local organisations including Tarangini will air their views on the topics and suggested ways and means of resolving the issues at different levels.

Leading Veena artistes from different parts of the country presented Veena recitals in the evenings on the three days. □

THE YEAR GONE BY ...

(A birds' eye view of events)

The year gone by was of great significance for the country which was celebrating the 50th year of Independence. People in all walks of life started getting up programmes to celebrate the historic event and the performing arts had a good measure of it too.

The celebration got going from August 15 (1997) itself. From then on almost every cultural festival had a relevant tag attached to its festivities, the Government having earmarked liberal grants for the purpose. The festive air was palpable to the touch on all such occasions where artistes of different dimensions vied with one another to register their patriotic zeal through their mode of expression.

One of the most attractive of them all on the dance scene was the annual Sharad Vaibhava of Prasiddha Foundation. Unlike its predecessors which combined music and dance for its fare, the focus in 1997-98 was on dance, Bharathanatyam to be precise. Besides a rich evening fare of recitals by some of the top names in the genre, was a stimulating colloquium on the dialectics of the ancient art form.

Here again, a cross-section of all those involved in the art, directly and indirectly, aired their point of view on varied aspects from disparate angles. The discussions had generated as much enthusiasm as in a dance recital, the open-house session revealing the keen

interest evinced throughout by the City's dancing fraternity.

As it is becoming growingly evident in all such festivals in the metropolis today, the response to the evening recitals was overwhelming, the organisers having a tough time in meeting the demands of unending queues. What is of significance is that though Bharathanatyam has assumed different dimensions like the duet, dance-drama and experimental features, the original Sadir or the solo form, has not lost its flavour and carries conviction with the dancer and the connoisseur alike.

It bears repetition that the fare in the festival was Sadir and the artistes individually and severally had no difficulty in testifying to its credibility and sustaining character.

The main draw in the three-day fare was reserved for the last day, its star attraction being the celebrated Vyjayanthimala Bali.

The proceedings actually began with a recital by Pratibha Prahlad, the Director of the Foundation. Her invocatory through "Brihadeswara Maha deva" (Kanada) of M. Balamurali Krishna revelled with a rich array of Sthanakas, a fascinating cascade of Jathis testifying to her finesse in choreography. The approach in "Sadinchane", Arabhi 'Pancha ratna' of Thyagaiah, was as absorbing, Pratibha's fluid angikas and studied facials, accounting for a ready rapport. But the sequential 'charanas' unfolded too long an array of 'theermanams' that appeared repetitive and often dragging too. It certainly could do with some stiff editing if it has to sustain audience interest.

Chitra Visveswaran who followed, is as exuberant in her demeanour. This was evident in the gay abandon with which Chitra delineated the Pallavi in Lalgudi Jayaraman's Varna "Innum Enmanam" (Charukeshi). Supple 'angikas' and spacious Adavus coupled with her light-footed movements lent an eye-



Colloquium "VAIBHAVA": Noted Dance personalities Kalanidhi Narayanan, V.P. Dhananjaya and Lakshmi Viswanathan

filling charm to her Nritya. But her Abhinaya for the three-tiered Nayika was no match to her exhilarating Nritya. In fact, her portrayal could do little justice to the underlying Virahotkhandita, Khandita or Vasikasajja. It fell short of conviction, to say the least.

Though Vyjayantimala Bali is past her prime, her trite 'angikas' glow in their linear grace, her stance itself so elegant that it could put a young damsel to shame! These

Shankarabharana Varna stood out for its faultless lines and neat Adavus. The Nritya was executed with effortless elan. His Abhinaya was no less incisive, though his eyes have lost much of their glow. Yet it was an admirable display of trenchant discipline, something that is lacking in most younger dancers.

Earlier in the day, A. R. Sridhar, Kiran Subramanyam and Praveen Kumar, three of our frontline male dancers

Of the others, Navatej Singh Johar, another alumnus of Kalakshetra impressed with his elegant stance and disciplined Nritya. His facile disposal of the Varna (Sriranjini) was marked for its neat 'Korvais' and spacious movements. But his 'mukhija' fell short of direction maybe due to his beard!

The other scene

The world of music had its own special features. The most important among them was the departure made by the 97-year old Bangalore Gayana Samaja. In its annual conference in October 1997, the Samaja broke a convention to invite an artiste from outside the State to preside over it. Till then the prestigious presidency was the sacred preserve of the local musicians.

The artists so honoured was the violin virtuoso Lalgudi G. Jayaraman who thus qualified himself to receive the coveted title Sangeeta Kalaratna. Interestingly, the maestro for some specific reason had spurned a similar distinction (Sangeeta Kalanidhi title) of the Music Academy, Madras.

The Gayana Samaja's move had the whole-hearted welcome of musicians and connoisseurs alike locally, thus vouching for his popularity. The proceedings of the conference and the concurrent music festival were a grand success, Jayaraman himself making a speech worthy to his stature and the occasion.

Atreya



Elated : Dancer Pratibha Prahlad, Chitra Viswesvaran and Columnist Maitretyi Sinha caught in a lighter mood

features came to the fore in the rare Varna "Kanalavananen" (Kambodi). Though the initial 'theermanams' betrayed a lack of concentration, Vyjayanti's keen sense of 'laya' and well defined 'anga shuddham' compensated the shortcomings. Nor did her lustreless eyes defeat the purpose of invoking the 'Vipralabda' Nayika in her portrayal. It was indeed a valiant effort that elicited unrestrained appreciation from the packed house.

C. V. Chandrasekhar, one of the senior-most alumnus of Kalakshetra and whose best days are far behind him, commands as much respect and admiration of dancers and gurus alike. His delineation for "Manavi Chai", the celebrated

made a plesing trio. They went into stride from the initial forays for a verse from Krishna Karnamrita which has been convincingly adopted as a Varna (Ritigoula). What made it especially attractive is its sprightly choreography that easily met the demands of the setting. The trite Nritya itself revealed resolute rehearsals and could do proud to their earnest approach. Though exemplifying 'bhakti', a rasa which offers little scope for sustained Abhinaya, the portrayal held no hassles to the trio. But none of the facials could be fully evocative, the 'drishti' of Kiran unaccountably exceeding the limits of aesthetics as opposed to Praveen whose eyes were near static.

TWO LIVING LEGENDS

At last, Bharata Ratna, the country's highest civic award has come the musicians' way. And who could be a more worthy artiste for this coveted honour than the redoubtable **M. S. Subbulakshmi**! Though recognised as a leading Carnatic vocalist, MS as she is familiarly referred to, is as popular with the Hindustani fans. Gifted with a mellifluous voice, ringing with devotional fervour, her music has an universal appeal. Indeed, she has become a household name throughout the length and breadth of the country. Through her spiritually inspired renditions like Sri Venkateswara Suprabhatam, Vishnu Sahasranama and Shankar's Bhajagovindam her euphonic influence has made an indelible impact on the learned and laity alike. Her Meera 'bhajans' as also the national ditties of Bharatiyar and Gurudev's compositions add to the range of her repertoire.



M.S. Subbulakshmi



Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer

As a classical vocalist, MS has few peers. Individual concerts or music festivals the world over, there is no other artiste in living memory who has attracted more listeners. With equal emphasis on the song and the word, MS resonates her rendition with an old-world charm and a new-world sensitivity. Indeed, her vocalism has the power to seduce anyone, anywhere in the world.

Her contribution as a worthy citizen of our great country is more enduring. She is a rare human soul who has not only earned huge sums of money through concerts,

royalties and cash awards, but has given away a major part of it to noble causes in the field of education, health, cultural pursuits, religious institutions and individuals in need. As Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde had remarked at a function to felicitate her on her 75th birthday, "She is a real 'Bharata Ratna'". Only, it has now received an official seal, a seal which surely enhances the status of the national honour, more than adding to her glorious life of fulfilment.

As fascinating is the musical career of **Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer**, the doyen of Carnatic music. Like his illustrious compeer, his career spanning over seven decades is strewn with innumerable awards and honours, including the Padmavibhushan. The crowning glory of it all is the prestigious "Swathi Sangeeta Puraskar" instituted by the Kerala Government in 1997 in memory of Maharaja Swathi Tirunal whose musical compositions for Carnatic and Hindustani styles bring into focus Kerala's long tradition in the art. It is in the fitness of things that Semmangudi should be the first recipient of this award. It bears repetition that it is this veteran who is responsible in popularising the Maharaja's kritis. He has not only rendered them extensively in his concerts, but has been teaching them to a long line of his disciples. More, he has immortalised them by publishing them with notation so that it would be useful to musicians of generations to come!

S. N. Chandrasekhar

RAMA NAVAMI: THEN AND NOW



From the austere Harikatha 'saptahas' to the presentday musical extravaganza, the Rama Navami celebrations in the City have come a long way. The transformation itself has been far-reaching both in content and the duration. Harikatha which used to occupy the entire proceedings, has almost become a thing of the past and the duration has extended beyond the denominated nine days.

Time was when Ramanavami was as much a domestic affair as the Navaratri which is today observed as 'nada habba'. Like the latter which was known as 'sharannavaratri' and culminated with the worship of Durga, Rama Navami was known as 'Vasanta Navaratri' culminating with the worship of Sri Rama, the 'avatar' of Vishnu who was born on that auspicious day in the bright half of Chaitra. My own memory goes back to my great aunt, Smt. Meenamani Ammal, a daughter-in-law of Dewan Seshadri Iyer who was a devout householder. She observed both these nine-day events with much fervour and grandeur. While the Navaratri was an occasion for day-long 'archanas' of Goddess Durga, Rama Navami held greater

attraction to the younger generation in the large family due to the fascinating daily evening 'bhajans', led by her versatile daughter, Smt. K. Dharmabai (who incidentally had been married to T.P. Krishnaswami, brother of the one and only T.P. Kailasam). It was entirely due to her inspiration and encouragement that many of us youngsters were able to realise our own musical sensibilities and develop a taste for music and its allied arts. She would also give a chosen few of us persistent rehearsals for a pouranic musical play which would be mounted on the last day of the festivities.

The celebrations assumed a new dimension when my maternal uncle, the renowned Bangalore Krishna Bhagavata returned after his wanderings in search of a 'guru'. He had met him in Madurai and under his guidance had mastered the art of Harikatha. Almost the first thing he did on his return is to organise the Rama Navami celebrations with the help of a few like-minded individuals in Malleswaram. As explained earlier, the daily evening programmes were confined to Harikathas, many a local and some outside vidwans delivering the discourses.

It may well be said that this pioneering effort of Krishna Bhagavata inspired S.V. Narayanaswamy Rao to start a similar venture on his own in the southern part of the city.

Like the former, it had a humble beginnings. The complexion of the programme itself had undergone a change. It was a mixed fare of Harikathas and music recitals. Almost the first year's list had included a 'katha' by Krishna Bhagavata. His unostentatious style, with no side accompaniments save a 'sruti box' and a diction which was tinged with emotion, instantly caught the imagination of the devout listeners. Thus, his 'kathas' became an annual feature in the Mandali's celebrations, till the Bhagavata launched a series himself. That venture was the forerunner to the Bhagavata's ambitious project of putting up a permanent structure for Sri Rama on the same lines of the one in Malleswaram. The object was achieved and for a couple of years the annual festivities were held in the new premises much to the delight of the Bhagavata and his friends. But later events changed the very destinies of the institution which now runs a school with all its commercial wrappings.

But Narayanaswamy Rao's Mandali meanwhile, grew from strength to strength. With influential personalities like the redoubtable T. Chowdaiah taking personal interest in its affairs, the Mandali was able to attract celebrated vidwans from all over the South. Music naturally became the mainstay, Harikatha hardly getting a slot in the bill of fare. But the annual event itself became something music lovers in the city eagerly looked forward to.

DIAMOND JUBILEE FETE

The music festival of the renowned Chamarajapet Sri Ramaseva Mandali will assume special significance in the year 1998. The Mandali will be celebrating its diamond jubilee this year and it has determined to make the annual festival a gala affair.

The Mandali, undoubtedly the oldest in conducting this type of extravaganza, has the reputation of hosting the best in the field, including a sizeable number of Hindustani artistes of repute. Its record reveals an awe-inspiring list of stalwarts from more than three generations of artistes of all denominations. Indeed, it is no secret that all of them without exception have maintained that it is a privilege to sing in the prestigious festival which extends to beyond 45 days annually.

The Festival-1998 certainly promises to be more imposing, considering its importance and the extra care that is being taken to make it a grand success. The duration itself will extend to 60 days and will include a whole galaxy of talent, young and old, drawn from all over the country. It should be a veritable feast of music at its classical best.

One of the highlights of the diamond jubilee is the concerts in the junior wing, starting an hour before the regular slots. This section will be treated as a competition so as to introduce a more serious approach among the aspirants and listeners. Attractive prizes

will be awarded to winners in the competition.

As it is 60 young aspirants have been listed in the different categories like vocal, instrumental and percussive. This, it is hoped, will also attract a more encouraging audience rather than the usual handful comprising the close relations of the participating artiste.

It will also help scouting talent which should be one of the objectives of any such festival.

The festival proper itself promises to be a real treat. One can find a long line of noted Carnatic artistes with a few chosen Hindustani stalwarts to make the meat!

□

Music, Dance Institutions are invited to send news & reports on their activities. Articles and features are also welcome.

Cassettes on Music & Dance may be sent for review.



TUNEFUL ENCOUNTERS - 12 : BAMBOO MAGIC

S. N. Sivaswamy

As I was reading Sri Venkatraman's article "In the footsteps of Mali" in the January 97 issue of "Phoenix" the memory of another disciple of Mali flashed across my mind. That is N. S. Srinivasan whom probably Sri Venkataraman had not known sufficiently well.

Srinivasan was not seen much in Bangalore and so he was not very familiar to many of us here. He joined service as a flutist in AIR, Hyderabad while in his early twenties. He was of an extremely friendly disposition, highly talented and was very popular in AIR, Hyderabad, apart from being a brilliant exponent of the flute.

Besides their exclusive musical style, Mali and Srinivasan shared a passion for the game of cricket.

My uncle Bangalore Krishna Bhagavata was responsible for bringing Mali over to Bangalore. Mali was in his early teens he took Bangalore's musical circles by storm with the unique combination of the conventional and the unconventional which he displayed in his soulful Ragalapana and melodious patterns of Swaraprastaara. He used to stay with one or the other of my relations and I made it a point to attend all his private and public flute concerts in the city. I too was in my teens, finishing my high school course and I spent all Sunday afternoons playing cricket with Mali and my uncle and cousins of my age group.

We had neither the regulation leather ball, nor the improvised tennis ball for our games, but was somehow in possession of a hard core cork ball. Once one of us pitched a fast one with this cork ball at Mali and it popped up to hit his forehead.

The injury was not serious, but caused enough bleeding and pain to force Mali to wear a bandage for sometime. Soon we had all forgotten the incident. All that I remembered of the young Mali of those days was his awe inspiring music.

Eventually I finished college and went out of Bangalore looking for a job, ultimately landing up at AIR, Madras. During a visit to Bangalore, I was once invited to a concert by Mali. Some years had elapsed since I met him and he had become a very famous man. When I entered the concert hall, the recital had begun, and so I stealthily entered by a side door hoping nobody would notice my unpunctuality. However, Mali had noticed my entrance and, putting his flute down, shouted across the hall "hey! Sivu, come over here!" He also pointed to his forehead where the cricket ball had left a scar!

Though a late comer, for the remaining part of the concert I sat right in front of Mali, and he was that day at his enchanting best.

At AIR, Hyderabad, I had no occasion to play cricket but came to know that N. S. Srinivasan was an even greater

enthusiast of the game than Mali. He used to entertain us with mock running commentaries, and being a good mimic, he could produce all kinds of sounds connected with cricket commentaries including noises of a surging crowd and even the static laden radio waves.

Once when R. K. Narayan was dinner guest at our house, I had requested Srinivasan to join us, and bring his flute with him. Srinivasan delighted us that evening with a display of his versatile talent and reproduced some of Malis unforgettably beautiful sangati's in Kapi, Behag and Kanada ragas.

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MAY ISSUE

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Resume on Karnataka
Ganakala Parishat
Musicians Conference.

Kinkini Dance Festival

A Review

DOWN MEMORY LANE : SOME MUSICIAN - ACTORS

Bangalore K. Venkataram

When I made references 14 months ago to MKT (Thyagaraja Bhagavathar) and Desigar (M. Dandapani Desikar), my friend N. Srinivasan (of the Indian Fine Arts Society, Chennai) reminded me of some more musician-turned actors. Particular reference was made to our C. Honnappa Bhagavathar. He was a desciple of Sambanda Murthy Bhagavathar, whose music, apart from his narrative in his Harikathas was fine examples of Sangeethopanyasa, an art slowly declining. I had heard some reputed Sangeethopanyasakaras like Malgudi Chidambara Bhagavathar. Dr. Muttiah Bhagavathar whose presentations I was not fortunate to listen was another stalwart. Later exponents of this divine art like Tiruvaiyar Annaswamy Bhagavathar, Embar Vijayaraghava chariar, Saraswathi Bai, Balakrishna Sasrigrigal were noted for their high standard of classical music inherent in their scholarly discourses.

Sambanda Murthy Bhagavathar's Kathas were more like music concerts, inters-persed with story element. Veteran musicians of repute like Arunachalappa (Harmonium), M. L. Veereshariah (Mrudangam), K. S. Manjunathan (Ghatam) used to share the platform with him. There used to be 'laya vinyas' (Thani) turns, not to speak of elaborate Alapana, Niraval (suitable sahitya vinyasa). Youngsters like me

used to flock at the Venkataramana Swamy, temple popularly known as 'Lado's Temple' during the Thyagarajothsavas organised and participated by stalwarts like Narayanaswamy Bhagavathar, Chintanapalli Ramachandra Rao, H. Puttachar and others. Honnappa used to provide 'pin paattu' (supporting vocal refrain) to Sambanda Murthy Bhagavathar. Later, Honnappa also resorted to Harikathas.

He started his film career in the Tamil film 'Ambikapathy' (released in 1938) in which he starred with MKT, appearing as a court musician in the durbar of Kulothunga Chola. All the hit songs in the film were very popular at the time. When MKT was jailed, Honnappa took his place in the film world. He was very busy in the film world and acted in several films like Prabhavathi, Raja Rajeshwari, Burma Rani, Kundalakeshi (Modern Theatres), Sri Murugan, Valmiki (Jupiter Pictures). As actor Honnappa also sang his songs in these films. The ragamalika "Bhagavan avath arippar" in Valmiki was in very great demand at that time.

Later, he himself produced many films in Kannada like Gora Kumbara, Kalidasa etc. The piece in Kalyani "Shrungaara Vaahini Mana Mohini" with the essence of the raga inherent in it and the sloka "Maathanga Kanyaam"

in ragamalika in Kalidasa bear ample testimony to the technical quality of his music.

He was featured in Akashvani and honoured by the State Government, served the Karnataka Gana Kala Parishat, the forum of musicians of Karnataka as President and later presided over its musicians' conference.

★ ★ ★

Maharajapuram Krishna murthy, brother of Maharaja puram Vishwanatha Iyer started his career as an actor though he was good at music. He appeared in Nallathanga, Maya Machindra, Urvasiyin Sabam and other pictures. V. V. Satagopan came to cine field after graduating and acted in Navayuvan (filmed in London) paired with Surya Kumari in Madras, with KLV Vasantha in Madanakamarajan. He acted in Venuganam in which film N. C. Vasantha Kokilam had also acted. He stopped acting and entered the field of music. Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer himself had also acted in "Nandnar" with K. B. Sundarambal.

The latter acted in many films, where there were no hero's as in Nandanar, Manimekalai, Poompuhar, Thiruvidayadal, Karaikkal Ammaiyar etc. Thiruvayur Rajagopala Sharma was a music director for films like Chintamani and Shakuntala (in which M. S. Subbalakshmi was in the lead role). There are of course stray cases of great musicians participating in films; Dr. Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna played his role of Narda, Maestro Chembai Chowdiah-Mani were featured in an old film "Vani" produced years ago by Violinist T. Chowdiah.

□

HOMAGE

On this occasion when PHOENIX, true to its name is re-emerging with renewed assurance, I deem it my bounden duty to pay my homage to my esteemed friend and its founder. N. Sundarraj. Though he was the proprietor of a leading jewellers (Lakshmi Jewellery), his first love was photography. He was certainly better known as a photo-journalist and his closest friends were among photographers. Even as he was editing the popular photographic journal, **Indian Photography and Cinematography** which he had started nearly 20 years ago, he was free-lancing for the now defunct City Tab, making a mark both by his keen news sense and crisp captions.

Sundar was as well-known as a dedicated camera artist, having won laurels in almost every major photographic exhibition in the country. He was as enthusiastic in involving himself in workshops on the different technical aspects of the art and science of photography. No wonder many an amateur photographer in the city and its environs rushed to his modest lab for developing and printing their takes.

But what had given him greater sense of satisfaction is clicking portraits and concert pictures of musicians of all description. That was almost an obsession with Sundar, a craze which he had inherited from his elder brother, N. Srinivasan. He was a familiar figure in the 70-80 decade, clicking away in the pandal of the Sri Ramaseva Mandali of

THE FOUNDER



N. Sundarraj

Chamarajapet during its annual music festival. Sundar had taken over almost from where his brother had left after his untimely demise verily like that of his own! But Sundar went one further. He was not content with taking action pictures for files. He persuaded each artiste to pose for a portrait, to be later enlarged. At the time of his premature death. Sundar had a prize collection of such enlargements of celebrated artists of more than three generations. That was an exclusive preserve and an exhibition of such portraits in Chennai during the music season a couple of years ago had become the talk of the town.

In recent times, Sundar had become an indispensable part of both Carnatic and Hindustani recitals in the city besides dance recitals, clicking at will some assigned by the organisers and some on his

own volition. In either case, he would not charge any fee for his services or the supply of prints. Nor would he insist on a credit line, though if the publishers showed the courtesy to acknowledge or send a remittance directly to him, he would not mind it! Similar were the terms for the innumerable contributors to newspapers in the City without exception.

It is the same generous disposition of Sundar which made it possible to make PHOENIX available at such a nominal rate. He was not just managing editor of the monthly. He was the one who entered all the editorial matters, often writing some pieces himself, select the photographs to accompany it, plan the lay-out meticulously and organise the dispatch of the copies in due course. The responsibility of maintaining the accounts was also his, only the actual printing of the issues entrusted to a printery!

That is why his sudden death had created a void which was well nigh impossible to fill. Indeed, it is rarely that one comes across such a gentle human being and with him out of the scene, there was no alternative than to suspend the publication of the nacent monthly. Its re-emergence is as much a tribute to his sacred memory as to fulfil the obligation to the numerous subscribers none of whom questioned about the fate of their balance due. Luckily, his son Seshadri has stepped into his shoes and is sure to fill that gap in due course.

S.N.C

THEY HAVE LEFT US THE POORER



Dr. V. Doreswamy Iyengar



Chandrabhaga Devi



M.S. Natarajan

The year gone by has taken its own heavy toll on the cultural panorama of our land. Besides our own Sundarraaj, our cultural life has been made the poorer with the passing away of some of its most cherished artistes and promoters. Some of them were very close to this journal and the others had made significant contribution in enriching our heritage.

Phoenix pays its tribute to each one of them from the towering M. S. Natarajan who was an edifying link between the twin arts of music and

dance in the post-Independence era, Dr. V. Doreswamy Iyengar, one of the most loveable gentleman-musician of his generation, T. Sadashivam, who in the words of Swami Ranganathanandaji "Nurtured with tender love and care our dear M. S. Subbalakshmi, the queen of Songs" and Mr. Justice E. S. Venkataramaiah who within a short span of less than two years as the president of the local branch of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, had endeared himself to the entire artistic community of the city as a friend in need.

As indelible a mark was made by Dr. K. Shivarama Karanth's death. He was really a fountainhead of all arts.

Inevitably, a few of them have received a more detailed memoir as their life, work and contribution have had a direct bearing on music and dance.

M.S. NATARAJAN

He was no musician in the strictest sense of the term. Much less had he to do anything with the art of dance. Yet few in either sphere were more familiar with the twin arts and their respective exponents. He was M. S. Natarajan, a pioneer in the State in the field of orchestral music who passed away on September 14, 1997 after a brief but terminal illness.

If musicians were drawn by his 38-piece orchestra which ensured a regular source of income in a profession where the prospects were hardly remunerative, dancers of over three generations had discovered in him an inexhaustive reserve of knowledge in the

performing art, gathered as much by his own abiding interest in it as by his emotional involvement with Maya Rao, his exceptionally talented dancer and choreographer wife of international repute. But few in the present generation are aware that Natarajan's knowledge of the fine arts of painting and sculpture is as studied and profound as the former.

Natarajan's inherent interest in music had surfaced during his college days. That was in the late thirties. It was at his instance that a college orchestra was formed. The short-lived experiment was a forerunner to his trend-setting Saraswathi Orchestra. Though the successful ensemble could boast of a host of highly talented professionals, Natarajan was their undisputed leader, may mentor.

Natarajan was equally proficient in composing tunes to meet the needs and requirements of dance choreography. It was this unique trait that had attracted renowned dancers like the incomparable Ram Gopal, nimble-footed Sohanlal, the bewitching Tara Choudhury and a whole generation of dancers, representing the myriad fount of the Indian classical art. Maya who later became his wife, was perhaps the youngest of them all. Indeed, there is no doubt that it was due to his encouragement that this young Kathak fledgeling donned the robes of a professional artiste. And what a fulfilling dance saga it has resulted in.

Natarajan's tenure as a member and later as Secretary of the State Sangeet-Natak Academy (sic) was as eventful. It was his pioneering efforts that were responsible in

launching many laudable cultural exchange programmes.

His residence itself was a beehive of artistic endeavour right through the day, rehearsals for one programme or the other on the anvil. The spectrum of dance styles that were sparked by its tunes was as varied, from Kathak to Bharathanatyam, Kuchipudi to Odissi and Manipuri. As the Sadir form gained its momentum as opposed to the mixed fare or what has come to be recognised as 'oriental dance', the importance of orchestral musical support also dwindled and it was not long before the fond Saraswati Orchestra also intoned its Swan Song.

But Natarajan was not the type to idle. He kept himself busy with his dabblings with the world of painting and sculpture. Like a veritable impressario, he helped many interested in the plastic arts to cultivate art appreciation, leading to collection. He also encouraged quite a few youngsters to cultivate writing on the arts, some of them even emerging as critics of repute.

But what kept the wolf out of Natarajan's door was his long-standing dealings in the book business. Himself a collector of books, he had registered himself as bookseller, specialising in art books. His collection of such books, magazines, pamphlets, tracts and photographs on the allied subjects may form themselves into a rich archive, invaluable for those interested in the work of documentation. It is this material that attracted all and sundry to him and may well prove to be a memorial to him if it is carefully reserved for posterity.

CHANDRABHAGA DEVI

It is difficult to imagine dance halls in the City and elsewhere in the State without the graceful presence of U. K. Chandrabhaga Devi who passed away after a brief illness in the first half of 1997. Her sudden, unexpected death has not only left a void in the State Sangeet-Nruthya Academy of which she was the chairperson, but also in the hearts of innumerable dancers and dance lovers the world over.

Chandrabhaga and her accomplished husband, Prof. U. S. Krishna Rao had made a loveable dancing couple, belonging to an illustrious Bharathanatyam tradition. Braving the stigma attached to this ancient art at the time, the couple both hailing from distinguished families and both with a dedicated approach, lent a dignified aura to the art. With their recitals and impressive demonstrations to varied audiences, the refined duo not only popularised dance among the literati, but encouraged talented young boys and girls to pursue a career in it, both from the point of adding elegance to their presence and to derive the pleasure of dancing.

Their Maha Maya has been a beehive of enthusiastic youngsters, both Indian and from abroad, undergoing rigorous training in the intricacies of dance art. Many are the students who have graduated from the hallowed portals of that over 50-year old dance school. Pratibha Prahlaad, one of the senior-most among them, has earned international fame. There are

many more spread across the globe, some conducting dance classes and others content with their performance schedules.

Recently, when the State Government presented its prestigious "Shantala" award on veteran Krishna Rao, there were moistened eyes in the entire audience. For that was the first occasion when the maestro walked alone to the dais to receive the coveted honour. Right through their long, achievement studded career they had shared all joys, all honours and all triumphs. Rarely did either take part in a dance function alone, be it as mere members of an audience or officiating as chief guests. Yet, it must be said to the credit of Krishna Rao that he is facing the situation with a stoic heart and dignified equanimity. Qualities that evoke instant admiration from all his near and dear ones!

Dr. V. DORESWAMY IYENGAR

There are some individuals who make friends in the very first meeting. No sooner such friendship is struck, he would make the friend feel that he is one of his most intimate acquaintances.

One such rare personality was Dr.V.Doreswamy Iyengar who passed away late last year. His death has created a void not only in the world of music, but in the hearts of musicians and music-lovers the world over. Many more in the social and cultural life of our State, nay the country as a whole have felt the loss as intensely.

For though Dr.Iyengar was essentially a musician, he had friends in all sections of

society. He was so simple a human being, so unostentatious an artiste and so unofficial an administrator, he was easily approachable by anyone irrespective of his status.

Dr.Iyengar was a gentle colossus who strode the musical scene of the country for over six decades, decades strewn right through with laurels and achievements. Even before he had entered the portals of the college, he was a celebrity, having been anointed as the Asthana Vidwan of the Mysore Palace. He was barely in his teens at the time. Even at that tender age, he was recognised as the torch-bearer of a hoary tradition in the veena, hallowed by such immortal names like Seshanna, Subbanna and his own mentor Venkatagiriappa.

Though holding a university degree and with a modern outlook, he was as orthodox in music as his mentors. He was a purist, not prepared to compromise with the modern trends, whether it is experiments in fusion music or the growing craze for contact mike for the divine instrument. He suffered the pangs of witnessing vainikas one after another resorting to the gadget, his own students including his son D. Balakrishna being no exception. But Dr.Iyengar remained loyal to the old concept which ensured a melodic grace all its own. True to the old tradition, he rose to classical heights while playing for small audiences than before a large crowd. In fact, this writer himself is never tired of recalling nostalgic memories of one such intimate concert in his own residence way back in the early fifties.

Dr. Iyengar had just then taken charge as the Producer of music in the local AIR studios where the former's brother was a senior officer. As blissful has been his experience when the maestro was regularly featured in the annual Sri Ramanavami music festival in a private residence in Shankarapuram.

That was a time when artistes and listeners alike sought serious, solid music, three to four hours sessions being the norm. Needless to say that Dr.Iyengar adopted his style and technique to the modern, shorter version as adriotty, though he discreetly eschewed pyrotechniques to win popular appeal.

Dr. Iyengar was as eloquent as a speaker and conversationalist, his juicy anecdotes on his days in the Mysore palace and reminiscences of some fellow musicians eliciting rapt listening. That is what made even dreary audition sittings sometimes interesting and worthwhile for his fellow panelists.

Above all, Dr.Iyengar was undoubtedly one of the most popular artistes. Among his acquaintances could be counted some of the all-time greats in both the Hindustani and Carnatic traditions, each holding him in high esteem. The honours awards and recognitions that had come his way speak for both his scholarship and artistic sensibilities. But he was not affected by any of those honours. Mastery and modesty rarely keep company with each other, but in him they did, as his class-mate H.Y.Sharada Prasad has succinctly put it.

Atreya

KNOCKING AT THE DOORS OF FAME

Ranga Pravesha or an Arangetram is an important landmark in the life of a dancer. More so for a Bharathanatyam aspirant. But during the years one alas has had to contend with a decline in the standard of those who make a bow. The gurus, no doubt, have been approaching the event with all earnestness and the parents are seemingly as enthusiastic to see that their child has a gala debut. But it is doubtful if the debutante exhibits the same amount of seriousness.

At any rate, it is rarely that one comes across a debutante who answers all the prerequisites that are part of a debut. By and large the outline has its relevance, the laya and footwork revealing a sound grounding testifying to the Guru's hard work. One may even compromise with an unsteady 'angashuddham' and the relevant stances. But when one comes to basic 'rechikas' and such other nuances, there can be a near blank, not even an inkling to vouch for their awareness of these and their usefulness.

In the aspect of Abhinaya, the less said the better. Not many reach beyond the prosaic smile, though cases are not wanting where the smile which is an indication of the feeling of joy on being on stage, could be missing. The staid facials would invariably put one to doubt whether the dancer is familiar with 'drishti bhedas' at all. And in their absence how can there be any communication at all! Any prospect of a 'Nayika'bhava



Madhumati Rao

under the circumstances could be asking for the sky.

One obvious reason for this utter casualness is that the dancer, the debutante in particular, rarely gets a feedback, save the formal pleasant-aries. The euphoria can neither help the dancer to realise where she stands nor the teacher assess the results of her effort or the shortcomings in the overall. The outcome, complacency which can be disastrous.

Time was when at least a few newspapers were not averse to review debut performances. That is something which is more relevant than writing about one who has already made a name and for whom a review

is of little consequence. At best she or he would pick up a favourable phrase to use in the brochure!

It is in this perspective that an attempt is made here to recall some of the 'ranga praveshas' in the preceding months. Observations here might help the debutantes to dot the I's and dash the T's to see that, if they are serious contenders in the art, their efforts don't go a waste. They would do well to sit with their teachers to discuss what, where and how their efforts could be made really worthwhile.

MADHUMATI RAO, a student of Padmini Rao, is endowed with a supple figure that facilitates languorous 'angikas.' She uses it to advantage as evidenced in her trite Nritta. Her laya could not be faulted either, the Kalyani 'Jatiswaram' and the 'Korvais' in the varnam that followed testifying. But her 'mukhija' accounting for the Abhinaya was no match to her practiced Nritta. That she had not trained herself even to interpret such familiar lyrics like a Devaranama and a verse from D.V.G's 'Anthahpura Geethe' doesn't speak well of her application.

Besides the customary steady Nattuvangam of Padmini Rao, the pleasant debut of Vasudha as a Vocalist for dance, was the other high point, of that recital (Dec.12, 1997).

ACHALA VENKATESH: The opening stance in Achala's debut (Feb.2,1998) itself vouched for a lively confidence. The initial forays in the 'alaripu' and the familiar Jatiswaram stood out for their adherence to 'anga-shuddham', though her 'are -mandi' fell



Achala Bhargavi

short in proportion. What really held the recital together was the sprightly Nritha, highlighted in the Varnam 'Swami Ninne Kori' (Navaragamalike). The 'Korvais' were by no means elaborate and certainly not demanding as an endurance test. But the short, crisp 'sholkattus' accounted for a

dainty imagery, which appeared ideal for a debut. Here again, the mainstay in the Abhinaya was a pleasant smile which could hardly substantiate a profound 'Nayika' bhava.

While Sumana Nagesh was at ease in negotiating the syllables in Nattuvangam, Jahnvi Jayaprakash enhanced its resonance by her melodic refrain.

ROHINI: Kumari Rohini's debut had a special significance for her Guru Vandana Srinath. It was her Ranga Pravesha as a Nattuvanar, Rohini being her first student to go on the stage. It must be said to their credit that both had reason to compliment themselves.

The two-tiered invocatory and the customary Jatiswaram (Ragamalike) showed Achala's keen sense of laya. The 'angikas' were neat, but could certainly do with some flexions. The Varnam 'Rupamu Joochi' (Thodi) also stood out for its steady laya, though her hands seemed to lack finish at the 'muktayam'



Rohini



Anjali Rangadham

stage. Achala's main asset is a pair of dreamy eyes. But she has yet to learn to put them to more effective use if her Abhinaya has to gain substance.

Another debutante who demands attention for sheer versatility is Anjali Ranga dham, a student of Sundara Kumar. Much before her Ranga Pravesha at the Chowdaiah Memorial Hall recently, she had appeared in a solo Bharathanatyam recital in London as early as in April 1991!

What is more daunting is that she should be finding time for Bharathanatyam, an exacting art form, amidst her varied interests like vocal music and veena, Hindi 'Visharad', computer technology, swimming and tennis, besides the regular lessons in the college. How she would be able to do justice to dance, only the future can tell!

Shekar

CALLING AIR

Before resuming the usual round-up of radio music it would be worthwhile taking a glance at the 1987 Radio Sangeet Sammelan. After all, it is a major musical event of the year and it is certainly not too late to make an assessment of the concerts featured in it.

As is the custom, the concerts were held almost a month ahead of the regular broadcast. They were spread over the entire network, some major stations allotted more than one concert. The broadcast of the Sammelan itself was spread over nearly two months, 50 days to be exact. Generally, it covered one concert a day, though two morning slots including, it would be three sessions on Sundays. Which means there were as many as 65 concerts, featuring as many performers. The number of accompanying artistes was at least three times that number.

One glance through the schedule is enough to get an idea of the quality of music that was in store for the listeners. It was a mixed bag, excellence seemingly not the criterion in the selection. There were some seniors whose best was far behind them. Their present form could only cast doubts on their reputation. Hardly a few of the new names could have made a grade on the national level. The Sammelan had to sustain on the performance of a few others. They were good, but not unpredictable, few of them offering something that is really exciting!

Rather than mulling over the actual performance, the

treatment meted out to artistes of our own State deserves a note. No minor issue either. In the Carnatic segment, of the 65 concerts, only four were allotted to Karnataka. No doubt, R.N.Srilata, H.K.Narayana, Sukanya Prabhakar and gottuvadyam artiste Usha Ramamurthy (a transferee) are seniors and fully deserve their slice of luck. But percentage-wise it hardly does any justice. Even among the accompanists, the State's claim was not met squarely. Though it can count on a sizeable number of class violinists, not one was featured in the list. The only consolations that there should have been a sprinkling of percussion artistes.

The fate of Hindustani music in the State was worse, deplorable indeed. It almost appeared as if the power that be is blissfully ignorant that Karnataka's contribution to the northeren style is as solid as that of any other part of the country. Indeed the State has the proud privilege of being the only habitat of both the classical styles. Even today some of the best exponents of more than one 'gharana' hail from here. While Ramarao Naik is the senior-most vocalist in the Agra Gharana today, Gangubai Hangal enjoys a similar reputation in the Kirana Gharana. More importantly some of the youngsters like Vinayak Torvi, Parameshwar Hegde, Ganapati Bhat, Madhav Gudi, Venkatesh Kumar, Purnima Bhat, Jayteerth Mevundi to name only a few can stand comparison with the best in

the genre. A selection from them would have made all the difference to the complexion of the festival besides enriching its variety. At any rate, none of them would have been any inferior than many of their more fortunate and certainly less impressive contemporaries.

Much the same should be said about the "Sathis". It is doubtful if there is a more competent tabla artiste, other than the celebrated Zakir Hussain and his brother Fazal, than our own Raghunath Nakod. To boot, he is an AIR staffer!. His compeers Ravindra Yavgal and Viswanath Nakod are no less experienced and efficient. But no luck for any of them or their seniors like Seshagiri Hangal. Indeed, it almost appears that there was a conspiracy against the Hindustani talent in Karnataka. That is all for now!

The regular column in this regard would appear from the next issue.

ESSENCE

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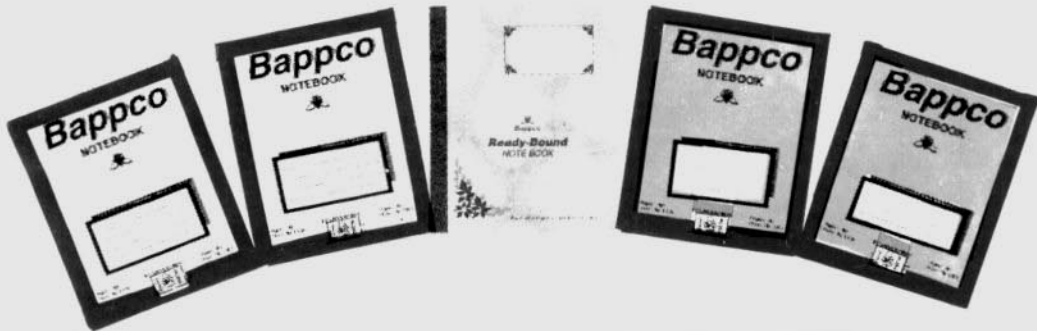


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